

# THE UNDOING OF BABEL

It was after the flood that it happened. Noah, a good and righteous man, had obeyed God and built the Ark, loaded in the pairs of animals, his wife, his three sons and their wives, and then closed the doors and waited for rain. God had told him it was coming.

On that day it began like most rains—a few drops here, a few more drops there, and then...the rain came down as though they were right beneath a waterfall. No one inside the Ark heard much of anything outside the confines of their tightly-filled space for the noise of the downpour. It covered most of what went outside of the Ark fairly well.

Soon the boat began to rock from side to side. Noah braced himself, but one jolt caught his wife by surprise and she fell. The animals shifted, bleated and growled and pawed at the floor. There was nothing much anyone could do about it, so Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, decided that it was time to rest before the animals' beckoned them to once more to care for their needs.

After it was all over--when all could finally disembark, when dry land returned--how good everyone felt with that first breath of fresh, clean air—and the rainbow! It was exquisite! The animals leaped and ran and hopped, all under the multi-colored arch of beauty in the sky.

God said it was time to go and live a good life now. They were to have children, descendants that would populate all of the earth. Noah planted a vineyard, and after a time he reaped the fruit of his work, although on occasion a bit too much fruit was his fill.

Drunk with wine, Noah staggered into his tent. Falling and tripping over his robes, they fell to the ground just moments before he did. In a drunken stupor he lay, naked and oblivious to his surroundings.

Shem and Japheth were not aware of their father's plight, of the result of his sin of over indulgence. They were busy about their daily business. Ham, however, was not like his brothers. God had blessed Noah's boys, but all was not well with Ham. He was perverse and his desires were not right.

Going to his father's tent, Ham should have called out before entering, asking permission from Noah to see him—but that is not what he did. Ham had found traces of what his father had been about outside of the tent, and thus suspecting Noah's condition he pulled back the coverings and entered.

We don't know exactly what happened next, but it is suspected that Ham's perverse mind was vividly, imaginatively busy in a shameful way. And because the sickness of his thoughts had so overcome him, Ham had the notion that his brothers' thoughts were of the same kind as his.

Joking, with exaggerated speech and a gleam of delight in his eyes, Ham told his brothers of what he had witnessed. Only Shem and Japheth didn't laugh or smile. They went to their father, and walking backward with coverings over their shoulders, cloaked his naked body, and then quietly and respectfully left Noah alone.

Noah found out what had happened and brought a curse upon Ham and his offspring. Ham had hidden his ways from his family before this, but no longer was it to be so—and God had always known, as God always knows.

Noah cursed Canaan, Ham's son. Ham's descendants were many and they scattered far and wide, including to Sodom and Gomorah and Babel—one of the cities that Nimrod the mighty warrior and a descendent of Ham founded.

Babel was a great city, far advanced in many skills and abilities. They were a proud people who delighted in themselves. It was decided that a tower should be built—a *ziggurat*--a mountain of stone--that would reach up to the heavens. But God saw that they were wicked people, having returned to the ways of those that had caused our Lord to send the flood, and so the Lord confounded their tongues with new languages that made it impossible for them to understand what each other was saying.

The people scattered, populating the earth far and wide. People who were before neighbors, friends and families were now strangers who no longer could communicate, and soon they couldn't recognize each other. And this is how it was.

Yet, God remembered the people of the earth, and soon would come Abraham and Sarah, and later Moses and David. A very long time went by, and the story that follows is often far from pretty—until one night when the sky was clear and the stars were gently lighting the land below, a child was born. He was Son of God and Son of Man, and he was righteous, sinless, and obedient—even unto death. His name was Jesus.

But there is more. He came out of the grave and went to be with His Father in Heaven. Fifty days later the Holy Spirit baptized the apostles of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, with mighty power and a fire that burned with love for God so great that they could not do enough to spread His message of forgiveness and salvation.

The apostles immediately began to speak in the languages of the world, languages that were previously unknown to them. No longer would fear grip their hearts. They spoke with authority the words given to them by their Heavenly Father.

It was the beginning of the Christian church, bringing all believers together and uniting them in the Name of Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord. Now, when believers scattered it wasn't for lack of understanding. Rather, they would bring the message of salvation, and the Body of Christ would continue to grow, vibrant and alive.

At Mount Sinai God gave the law on stone tablets. On Pentecost God gave himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. Let us rejoice for this gracious gift that is freely given. Amen.